



SIKH COUNCIL OF CENTRAL CALIFORNIA

'RECOGNIZE YE ALL THE HUMAN RACE AS ONE'

Guru Gobind Singh Ji

Dear Dr. Adams and members of the IQC,

My name is Pashaura Singh Dhillon and I live in Madera, California. I am a co-founder of the Sikh Council of Central California (SCCC), a non-profit organization representing 13 major Gurdwaras (Sikh Temples) in the Central Valley.

I was raised by Sohan Singh Bhakna in Punjab-India, who migrated from Punjab to America in 1909 and worked in the lumber mills along the Columbia River basin near Portland in Oregon. Sohan Singh was the founding president of the historic Ghadar Party formed in Astoria in 1913. Since I grew up under his care, apart from reading about it; I had heard from him the stories of extreme hardships of early migrants to Canada and America, founding of the Ghadar Party, sacrifices made by the Ghadrites and the inhuman treatment meted out to the immigrants from India aboard the ship, "Koma Gata Maru." As an SCCC member, I have been offering my input for the ongoing development of curriculum framework with the CDE. I have presented testimonies to the Curriculum Commission that was set up for updating the California History - Social Science Framework. The Sikh American community is pleased with the initiative to include Punjabi Sikh contribution to California's history and with respect to:

Grade-8, Page 241, lines 2375-77: "The Gold Rush in California and agricultural labor in Hawaii spurred Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, and Sikh South Asian (Hindu and Sikh) immigration to the United States. Eventually the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and the Immigration Act of 1917 greatly limited Asian entry to the United States. California built the immigration station at Angel Island to facilitate the process of Asian admissions." Need discussion.

Since the term South Asia covers a vastly diverse geographic, ethnic and cultural area spread over several countries, I am happy to present my testimony regarding East Indians for your consideration. People from British India migrated to North America in large numbers by those standards in the early 1900s. There were Punjabi Muslims and Hindu laborers among them but predominantly those were Punjabi Sikh peasants and retired military men. Coupled with recession and increased land taxes in the erstwhile Punjab, these peasants were finding it hard to earn a living and were therefore leaving for America for a better life. There were also some Indian students and intellectuals especially in Berkeley and Stanford. Ironically it was a time of racial, ethnic and religious intolerance and persecution by a section of the working class against new arrivals in America fearing this cheap labor will take over their jobs. The law of the land at that time did not help them either. Finding themselves between the rock and the hard place, Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims made community together in unique ways to form the Ghadar Party meaning rebellion. Organized and founded in Astoria, Oregon in 1913, largely initiated and attended by Sikh millworkers and activists, it was aided and joined by Hindu and Muslim intellectuals and laborers. Soon after its founding in Astoria, the activists moved the Ghadar Party headquarters to San Francisco due to strategic reasons and published the first news paper called Ghadar. All walks of Indians were welcome and worked together to free their shared home from the British rule in an exemplary way. Ghadar Party became the clarion call and a shot in the arm from a distant California for the struggle for independence that was being waged at home in India. India achieved its freedom later in 1947.

Thank you.

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